

# The impact of Russian presence in Africa

Dirk Kohnert<sup>1</sup>

*'South Africa's love-affair with Russia'*



Credit: *Say my name* (2017)<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Putin attaches great importance to rebuilding Russia as a world power, including relations with Africa. But while the Soviet Union used to advocate socialist modernization in Africa, Moscow no longer offers socialist ideologies. Instead, it focuses on access to African elites, particularly authoritarian leaders. It also seeks to sway elections in its favour, particularly in fragile but resource-rich states. The Kremlin says it wants to avoid competing directly with other global powers active in Africa. Instead, it wants to focus on countries where neither the West nor China dominates. There it expects to be able to work more effectively. But Russia, like China, is challenging Western norms, undermining US and EU sanctions. In addition, both strategic partners support non-interference in the internal affairs of states. In addition, Russia's relations with Africa have been motivated significantly by its interest in African resources and security markets. Russia's resurgence in Africa benefits not least from Islamist terrorism, for example, in the Sahel and Mozambique. It uses fragile states and ongoing conflicts to secure lucrative arms deals and mining concessions. Moscow signed military cooperation agreements with 21 African governments, including negotiations on establishing military bases. It uses paramilitary contractors to manipulate the course of local conflicts in its favour. In return, Moscow can count on the support of African leaders in foreign policy. Thus, Eritrea voted against a UN General Assembly resolution strongly condemning Russia's war in Ukraine. 18 other African countries abstained, including Mali, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa.

**Key-words:** [Russia](#), [invasion](#), [Ukraine](#), [Africa](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [African affairs](#), [international trade](#), [global power](#), [African resources](#), [fragile state](#), [Islamist terrorism](#), [arms deals](#), [BRICS](#), [China](#), [Eritrea](#), [South Africa](#), [Nigeria](#), [Mali](#), [Mozambique](#), [energy security](#), [EU](#), [NATO](#)

**JEL-Code:** F13, F21, F35, F51, F52, F54, G28, H56, H77, N17, N47, P16, P27, Z13

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<sup>2</sup> Say my name (2017): South Africa's love affair with Russia: Old ties from the days of struggle are being renewed. London: *The Economist*, Johannesburg, 18 March 2017.

## 1. Introduction

The post-war engagement of the former [Soviet Union](#) in Africa started in the mid-1950s with the [Bandung Conference](#) (1955) of non-aligned Asian and African countries. The Soviet approach of '[counter-imperialism](#)' was the official ideology that emerged during the second half of the 1960s (Barratt, 1981). However, in reality, Moscow's Africa policy was a mix of ideology and [realpolitik](#) that had been shaped by the geopolitical rivalry of the USSR in times of the [Cold War](#) up to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Matushevich, 2003). Russia and most African leaders shared a common vision of anti-colonialism, '[modernization](#)' and nation-building, stimulated not least by the Russian interest in Africa's resources and markets. An outstanding example was [Khrushchev's](#) backing of the first Prime Minister of the independent [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (formerly Belgian Congo), [Patrice Lumumba](#) who was murdered by allies of the West because of his alleged leaning to 'communist' ideologies. Although Moscow considered [African socialism](#), as propagated by [Julius Nyerere](#) in Tanzania, [Kenneth Kaunda](#) in Zambia, [Kwame Nkrumah](#) in Ghana, [Léopold Senghor](#) of [Senegal](#), [Sékou Touré](#) of [Guinea](#) (Conakry), and [Modibo Keïta](#) in Mali, as an unwelcomed deviation of 'true' Marxist-Leninist socialism, it provided aid, military support and social capital, e. g. scholarships for African students, studying in Russia (Kachur, 2022).

In the following Moscow's Africa policy will be analysed, starting with the 'socialist' period up to the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991, including the Perestroika in the late 1980s, and the geo-political orientated Africa policy of Vladimir Putin from 2012 until now. Thereby the substantial differences between Russia's African relations to Northern Africa (the [Maghreb](#) and [Egypt](#)) and Sub-Saharan Africa will be elaborated, focussing on the most important SSA countries, South Africa and Nigeria. Finally, the aftermath of the Russian Ukraine war on African relations will be outlined. The conclusion provides succinct explanations of the reservations of many 'socialist' African states to vote against Russia's aggression in Ukraine taking the example of Eritrea, and the stance of the EU, US and NATO vis à vis Putin's war.

## 2. Moscow's general Africa relations since the 1950s

Immediate after the independence of former colonial African states in the early 1960s, and continuing during the [Cold War](#), students from almost all African countries, whether 'socialist' or 'capitalist' orientated, studied in the USSR. A major destination was the [Patrice Lumumba University](#) in Moscow, founded in 1960 to assist developing countries that had recently become independent. Overall, 56,000 students from SSA studied at this most important university for Arab and African students within the former socialist bloc. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, it still counted 47,312 graduates from Arab countries and 43,500 from African countries, mostly studying medicine or engineering. Since 1979, African students in Russia outnumbered those studying in the [United Kingdom](#), another major destination of students from Anglophone developing countries. Yet, the Lumumba University was often considered by Africans as a discriminatory, if not racist institution. In everyday life, African students often had to face verbal and physical aggression by racist Russians. Nevertheless, between 1988 and 1991, Africans exceeded even those learning in the USA. Thereby African countries virtuously outplayed the competing 'socialist' and 'Western capitalist' blocs at various levels. After the [Perestroika](#), the attractiveness of Russian universities for African and Arab students declined sharply before it gradually recovered in the late 1990s (Yengo & de Saint-Martin, 2017).

**Graph 1:** “I will never forget a friend if I made friends with him in Moscow”  
African students at [Patrice Lumumba University](#) (Moscow). Propaganda poster, 1964



145. Сачков В.  
Друга я никогда не забуду, если с ним подружился в Москве! 1964

Source: Yengo, & de Saint-Martin (2017)

Following its policy of ‘counter-imperialism’, the [Kremlin](#) was opportunistic enough to co-operate with a wide range of countries, ranging from the most ‘progressive’ to the most ‘reactionary’. In West Africa, this comprised for example next to [Ghana](#), [Guinea](#), [Mali](#) and [Senegal](#) also the [Ivory Coast](#) and [Nigeria](#), the second biggest African economy, besides [South Africa](#), where Moscow backed the [ANC](#) during the [anti-apartheid struggle](#) (Legvold, 1970). Nigerian-Soviet relations reached their peak during the [Nigerian Civil War](#) of 1967-1970 in [Biafra](#) (Matusevich, 2003).

**Graph 2:** Top for arms suppliers to Africa, 2017

Country	Percentage of sales
Russia	37.6%
US	16.3%
France	14.6%
China	9.2%

Source: SIPRI (2017); all rights reserved, used with permission

Source: Paczyńska, 2020; SIPRI, 2017

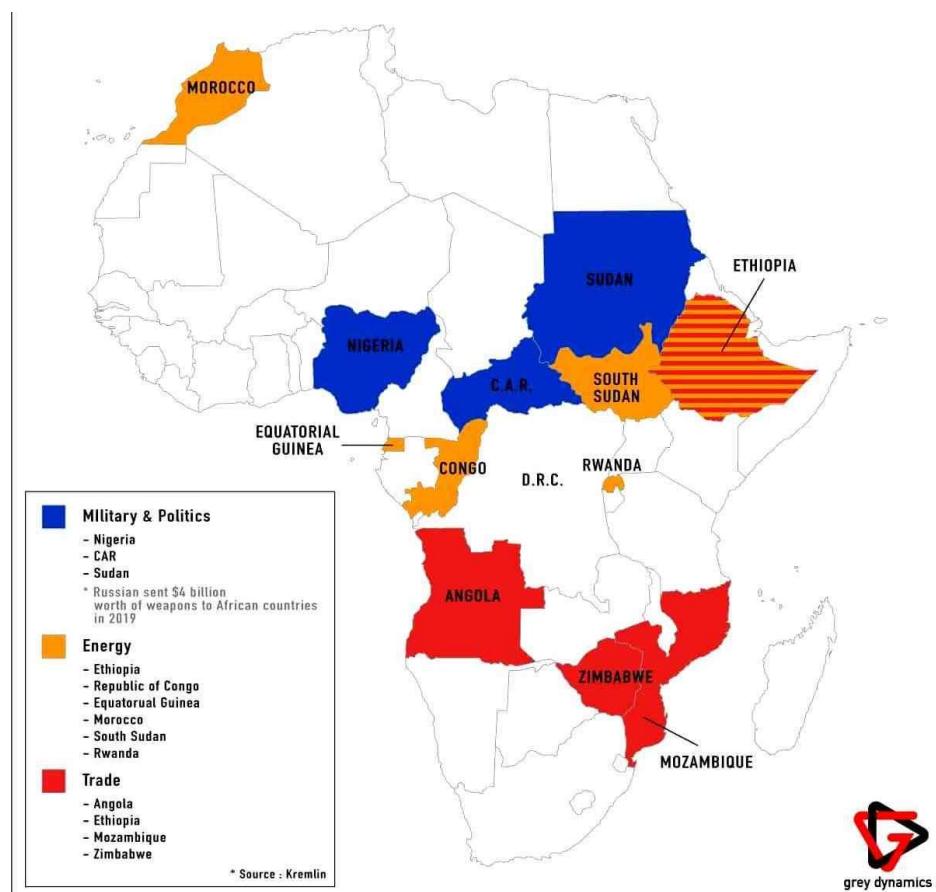
Yet, it would be misleading to rely too much on generalizations. In comparing the decade of 1955 to 1964 (i.e. including the post-Bandung Conference and the immediate post-independence period) with the decade from 1965 to 1974, a significant drop in Russian aid to Africa had to be observed. Africa's share of overall Soviet aid fell from 47 % to 13 % and the share of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) aid from 13 % to 4 %. Moreover, most of the reduced African aid was concentrated in North Africa (Barratt, 1981). This was followed by interventionist policies since 1975 and a focus on the geo-strategic important [Horn of Africa](#),

including [Ethiopia](#), but also the resource-rich [Southern Africa](#), notably [Angola](#), [Mocambique](#) and [Namibia](#).

Yet, the Soviet Union's leaning to exploit instability and conflict for its own ends did not necessarily promote peace in Africa (Barratt, 1981). Neither did the involvement of Western powers. Rather both used African independence movements to fuel proxy wars in SSA.

In the decade after the collapse of the Soviet empire Russian involvement in Africa grew significantly again since 2014. Moscow's strategy concentrated on a mix of arms sales, political support, notably of authoritarian regimes, and security cooperation in exchange for mining rights, market access and diplomatic support for its foreign policy. Russia became the largest arms supplier to Africa.

**Graph 3:** Russia's new deals in Africa

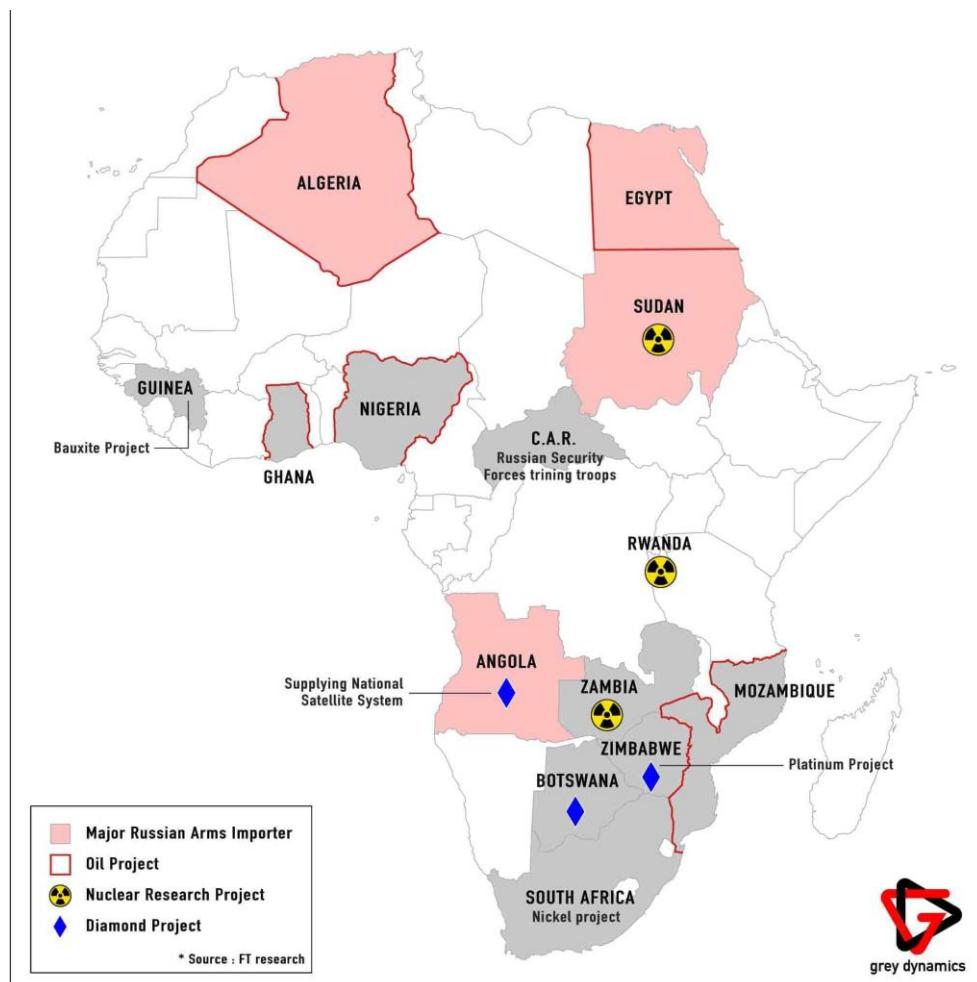


Source: Ersozoglu, 2021

Moreover, it increasingly tried to influence elections in fragile states, shoring up authoritarian strongmen in exchange for preferential access to the countries' resources (Paczyńska, 2020). Moscow offered its assistance to countries facing political and economic isolation because of Western sanctions and even deployed private military contractors, e.g. the [Wagner Group](#), to influence the outcome of local conflicts in its favour. Thus, Russia and China, which had asymmetric rivals in Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s, successfully challenged Western norms in supporting [non-interference in the internal affairs of states](#) (Ramani, 2021). Besides the most recent example of the replacement of French troops to combat Islamic terrorism in [Mali](#), [Mozambique](#) was another case. Since 2019 Russian mercenaries and military hardware were delivered to help the government fight jihadists, linked to terror groups [ISIS](#) and [Al-](#)

[Shabaab](#), and insurgents in the [Cabo Delgado province](#) in northern Mozambique, in exchange for military, economic and political collaboration, including the prospect of a future Russian naval military base in the country (Sukhankin, 2019). Thus, Moscow could also outmanoeuvre the competing French [Total](#) LNG project in Mozambique. Also, according to a report of the German intelligence service, published by the Foreign Ministry and a German tabloid, Russia was “contractually assured” to build military bases in [Mozambique](#), [Sudan](#), [Madagascar](#), [Egypt](#), [Eritrea](#), and the [Central African Republic](#) (Ersozoglu, 2021).

**Graph 4:** Russia widens the scope in Africa



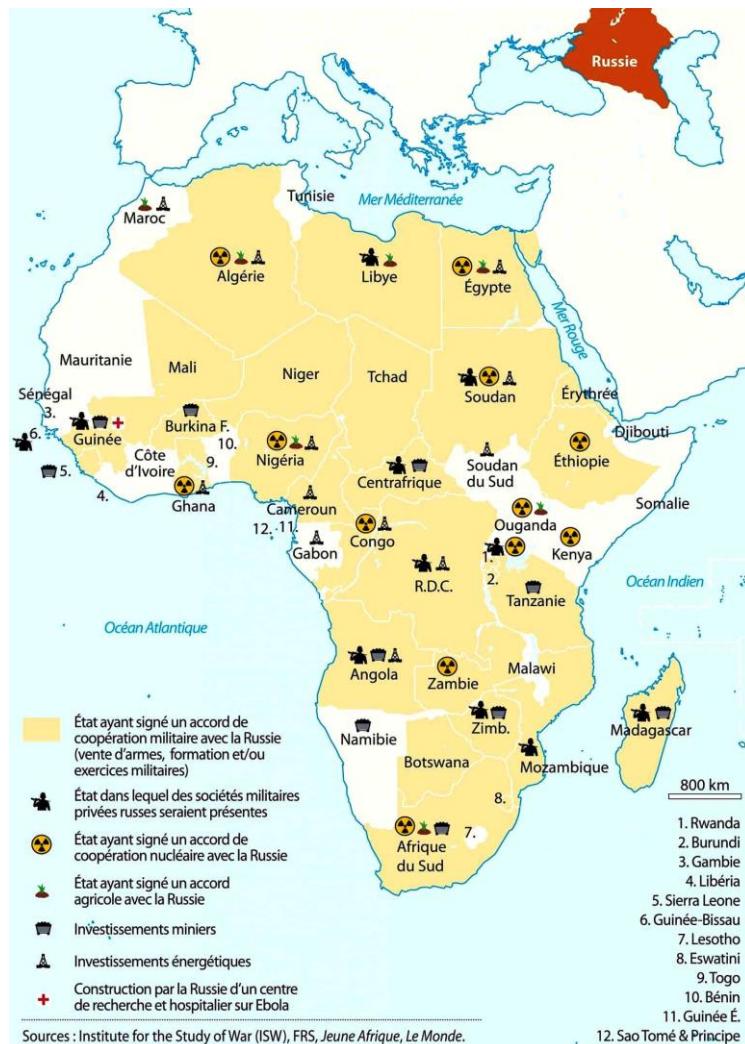
Source: Ersozoglu, 2021

The 2019 [Russia-Africa Summit](#) in Sochi, co-hosted by the Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) and Egyptian President [Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](#), the first of its kind and attended by 43 African heads of state, confirmed this policy. It led to several treaties, including between Moscow and the [African Union](#) (Clifford, 2021). A second summit had been planned for St. Petersburg in October 2022. However, because of the Russian Ukraine war and the opposing majority of African states, it is unlikely that it will realize.

Russian trade and investment in Africa have grown significantly, particularly in the [Maghreb](#), [Egypt](#) and [Sudan](#) (Paczyńska, 2020). One reason was the growing attractiveness of the African gas and oil markets for Russian corporations such as [Rosneft](#), [Gazprom](#), [Lukoil](#), not just as an opportunity to increase production and impact on the global gas market, but also to

influence pricing and market conditions of other countries (Shakhovskaya & Timonina, 2019). This, the more so, regarding the envisaged Western oil and gas import embargo as a reaction of the US and the EU to Putin's war in Ukraine. In this respect, the repeated suggestion of Western politicians and media that the EU and its member states should expand African gas imports, including [Nigeria](#), [Egypt](#), [Mozambique](#), [Tanzania](#) and [Ghana](#) (Fox, 2022; Whitehouse, 2022) proved to be a mixed blessing.

**Graph 5:** Russia in Africa in 2019



Source: Lévesque, 2020

Trade between Russia and Africa doubled since 2015, to about \$20 billion a year in 2021 according to the African Export-Import Bank President Benedict Oramah. Russia exported \$14 billion worth of goods and services and imported roughly \$5 billion in African products. Strategic raw materials are of particular interest. For example, [Rusal](#) a company that excavates Bauxite, the source of aluminium, in Guinea and nuclear group [Rosatom](#) mines uranium in Namibia. [Alrosa](#), the world's largest diamond mining company, was trying to expand operations in Angola and Zimbabwe, according to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Guensburg, 2022).

**Graph 6:** Russian trading partners in SSA, 2019



Source: Guensburg, 2022; World Bank / UN

### 3. Russia, the Maghreb and Egypt

The contest for primacy between the USSR and the West in geo-strategic important [Egypt](#), including the check on the [Suez Canal](#), started immediately after the withdrawal of Britain from its former colony. This opened up attractive opportunities for whoever succeeded in replacing the colonial order to create novel spheres of influence in the Nile region and the [Middle East](#). When President [Gamal Abdel Nasser](#) nationalized the canal, which led to the [Suez Crisis](#) of October–November 1956, Russia became Cairo's first ally. In the decade from 1965 to 1974, most of the reduced Russian aid to Africa was concentrated on North Africa (Barratt, 1981). The loss of Egypt in the early 1980s heralded the end of Soviet supremacy in the [Maghreb](#) region and [Egypt](#). Until then, Moscow had been the principal military supporter of [Cairo](#). A period of retreat, as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1991, was followed by Russia's revitalized engagement in the early 2010s. During the presidency of [Anwar Sadat](#), who reoriented the country to the West, Soviet-Egyptian relations became more distanced. Bilateral economic cooperation stopped on most projects. Soviet specialists continued to work only on projects where they were engaged in modernization (e. g. [Helwan](#) metallurgical plant, cement plant in [Assiut](#), Tabin refractory plant). Relations normalized only when [Hosni Mubarak](#) came to power after Sadat's assassination in 1981 (Kameneval & Lukyanova & Tavberidze 2018). Political relations between Moscow and [Cairo](#) improved considerably since Putin's rule in 2000 and since 2014 by subsequent ruling Egyptian elites under the current president [Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](#), focusing on cooperation in the field of energy and military assistance (Purat & Bielickim 2018).

A fundamental change in multilateral relations arrived with the [Arab Spring](#) in 2011. Although the [Libyan revolution](#) too could be considered as an extension of social and political movements in [Tunisia](#) and [Egypt](#), the Kremlin was unsure about its real driving force. It considered it rather as a failed coup d'état and not a popular revolution (Chuprygin, 2019).

[Libya](#) plunged into chaos again after the 2011 uprising, backed by NATO military intervention, toppled autocrat [Muammar Gaddafi](#). For years, it has been split between rival administrations in the east and the west, each supported by various militias and foreign governments. In April 2019, rebel leader Gen. [Khalifa Haftar](#), backed by [Egypt](#) and the [United Arab Emirates](#) (UAE), had been on the verge of capturing the capital [Tripoli](#). Allegedly, also British, French, U.S. air forces had assisted Haftar's forces. However, when [Turkey](#) and [Qatar](#) stepped up their military support for the regular government, recognized by the UN, the invasion failed. The UN-mediated cease-fire agreement of October 2020 resulted in a transitional government and scheduled elections for 24 December 2021 that however were postponed. The UN political chief, [Rosemary DiCarlo](#), warned the [UN Security Council](#) on 16 March 2022 that Libya could again see two rival administrations and a return to instability. She urged elections to be held as soon as possible to unify the war-torn country (Daily Shaba, 2022). Russia, on the other hand, continued to make further inroads on the continent in currently unstable countries, including in the Central leverage the instability to increase its influence and to show support for leaders favourable to Russian interests, erode Western influence in the region (Clifford, 2022).

[Algeria–Russia cooperation](#) has been excellent both during the Algerian war of independence (1954–62) and during the Cold War. Both partners concluded a “strategic partnership”, the first such document Moscow had signed with an Arab country (Mousli, 2019). In 2006, when President Vladimir Putin visited [Algiers](#) in March, Russian arms sales, as well as a settlement of Algeria's debt to Russia, were announced. Moreover, [Gazprom](#) and the Algerian state gas company, [Sonatrach](#), signed a memorandum of understanding in August. The latter aroused European fears that Russia and Algeria (two of the three principal EU gas suppliers) would collude to raise the price of gas. Besides, the threat of a gas supplier union developing outside the EU was a convenient additional justification for those French energy corporations trying consolidation inside the EU market, such as [Gaz de France](#) and former *GDF Suez* (now [Engie SA](#)) (Katz, 2007). Yet, already the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis of January 2006 had been assessed as being harmful to Algeria's interests. The risks resulting from this conflict for the exporters of natural gas supplying the EU via gas pipelines, such as Algeria and Norway, could be greater in the long term since this could result in Europe setting up a policy of diversification of its supply sources (Katz, 2007).

[Morocco–Russia relations](#) have traditionally also been very good, although [Rabat](#) still relies much on France, the EU and the US for political, economic and financial support. During the Cold War, Morocco was one of the Soviet Union's most important trading partners in Africa. However, in 1980, [King Hassan II](#) of Morocco criticised Moscow openly about the Western Sahara conflict, because Soviet arms were supplied to Algeria that handed it over to the [Polisario Front](#). Nevertheless, Russia never made any attempt to recognize the [Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic](#) (RASD). Still today, Morocco is Russia's most important phosphate supplier. Russia, on the other hand, offered to export wheat that until the outbreak of the 2014 war in Ukraine was supplied in considerable amounts by [Kyiv](#). Since the outbreak of the war, Morocco was considered also a ‘strategic partner’ (Schumacher & Nitoiu, 2015).

[Tunisia–Russia relations](#) changed also significantly since the Jasmine revolution in January 2011 which caused the fall of the autocratic regime of [Ben Ali](#) (1987 to 2011). In 2013, Moscow and [Tunis](#) concluded a trade agreement, stipulating an increase of Tunisian agricultural exports to compensate for the reduction of Russian imports as a result of western sanctions. But, all in all, bilateral foreign relations mainly reflected a temporary convergence of needs. They did not undermine Tunis's close links with the EU and the US (Schumacher & Nitoiu 2015). An especially rewarding collaboration concerned the realm of irrigation and

water management. Russia developed and implemented the General Scheme of run-off water to the north of Tunis and the southern regions of the country, including the construction of the first and second line of culverts Sedzhenan - Dzhumin - Medjerda and the supervision over the construction of other large dams (e. g. Dzhumin, Sedzhenan, Geza, Sidi al-Barak) ([Tunisia-Russia relations](#), Wikipedia).

Overall, several factors influenced Russian relations with Northern Africa, not least, many diplomatic and military mistakes of the Western powers involved. Moscow was able to exploit this to its own advantage in the [MENA region](#) because it did not bother about authoritarian regimes, fragile states, the Western quest for democratisation and sanctions. Merely the limited economic support that Russia could provide to the region, given its own difficulties, prevented Moscow's impact to increase even more than an occasional veto in the [UN Security Council](#) in favour of its Arab allies. After all, it is still an open question whether Russia (Europe and the USA) have been playing the Middle East, or whether they are being played by it (Chuprygin, 2019).

#### 4. Russia and Sub-Saharan Africa

According to Moscow's diplomatic circles, Russia tries to avoid a head-on confrontation with other global powers in Africa as in the times of the Cold War. It was said to focus rather on areas and countries in which neither the West nor China was yet active, not least because this would be less expensive (Goble, 2021). However that may be, African heavy-weights like South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya are still reliable Russian partners in Sub-Saharan Africa besides several other African countries. Also Russian and Ivory Coast relations became strong and friendly after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 although the country remained mainly attached to its former colonial power France. The bilateral relations became even stronger since Russia sent UN missions to the country ([Ivory Coast–Russia relations](#), Wikipedia).

[Russia–South Africa relations](#) had been distinguished from the early 1960s up to the end of the [Apartheid regime](#) in 1994 by its close relations with, and backing of the liberation struggle of the [African National Congress](#) (ANC) and its allies by logistic and military assistance. Moreover, cooperation with the liberation movement included diplomatic support, supplies of food, cars and trucks, building materials and other goods as well as medical assistance (Shubin, 1996). Another important aspect of backing the ANC's liberation struggle was Russia's assistance of [Namibian](#), [Angolan](#) and [Mozambique](#) independence movements and their resistance to South Africa's aggression. The Soviets blamed the Apartheid-regime to be the major cause of conflicts in Southern Africa (Shubin, 1996). This corresponded with Pretoria's blame mongering against the 'communist threat' to the whole region, widely shared by other Western powers, notably the USA. An outstanding example was a hearing on '*The role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in fomenting terrorism in Southern Africa*', organized in the [US Senate](#) in 1982 (Shubin, 1996).

Also, the first three or four years of [perestroika](#) (1985 to 1991) had a positive impact on the Soviet relationship with the ANC. However, since 1989, Moscow's relations with the ANC deteriorated. The novel rulers in the [Kremlin](#), [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) and later [Boris Yeltsin](#), preferred direct cooperation with [de Klerk's](#) government to obtain quick credits, loans, and investments. Personal benefits of Russian [oligarchs](#) might have accelerated the new orientation. The [1994 South African elections](#), the first in which also black citizens were

allowed to vote, and the creation of the [new government of Nelson Mandela](#), consolidated Russian-South African bilateral relations (Shubin, 1996). Under the presidency of [Jacob Zuma](#) ties became even closer because Putin tried to gain a foothold in this African country with the utmost geopolitical importance because it had had atomic power-[producing weapons of mass destruction](#) until 1990. Last, but not least, Moscow had enabled South Africa to join the [BRICS](#) community (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in 2010. Furthermore, the return of ‘Global Russia’ was facilitated by the interest of both partners in state-backed energy development, primarily in the nuclear sector. However, such projects that required heavy subsidies for the investor, also run the risk of burdening Russia’s nuclear power monopoly [Rosatom](#) with liabilities it can ill afford, notably if pursued mainly for geopolitical reasons (Weiss & Rumer, 2019).

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, the biggest economy and the top oil producer. The heydays of [Russian-Nigeria relations](#) arrived with Moscow's backing of the Nigerian government against the [Biafran separatist movement](#) (January 1967 to January 1970), resulting in the [Nigerian Civil War](#) (Matusevich, 2003). This facilitated the development of long-lasting cooperation in economic, political, security, social and cultural fields. Only the failure of the Soviet-Nigerian prestige project, the big state combine [Ajaokuta Steel Mill](#) that started in 1979 and remained incomplete up to date tarnished the relations temporarily (Wapmut, 2014). At the end of the Cold War, bilateral links diminished greatly, caused by the [perestroika](#) (1985 to 1991) and the downturn of the Soviet economy (Waliyullahi, 2016). However, the Putin government started a revitalization of bilateral relations. In March 2001 Nigerian President [Olusegun Obasanjo](#) and his Russian counterpart signed a partnership declaration, followed by an agreement on military cooperation, counter-terrorism and [maritime anti-piracy](#) in 2017 (Hedenskog, 2018), and on training and supplying the Nigerian Armed Forces on 26 August 2021 (Abdu & Ching 2021).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow was keen to get access to the markets of the EU and US. However, things changed after Russia annexed the Ukrainian [Crimea](#) in 2014. This prompted Western sanctions against individual Oligarchs, mostly prominent allies of President Putin, as well as major sectors of Russia’s economy. All this, reinforced by decreasing oil prices pushed Russia to look for alternatives in Africa (Kachur, 2020).

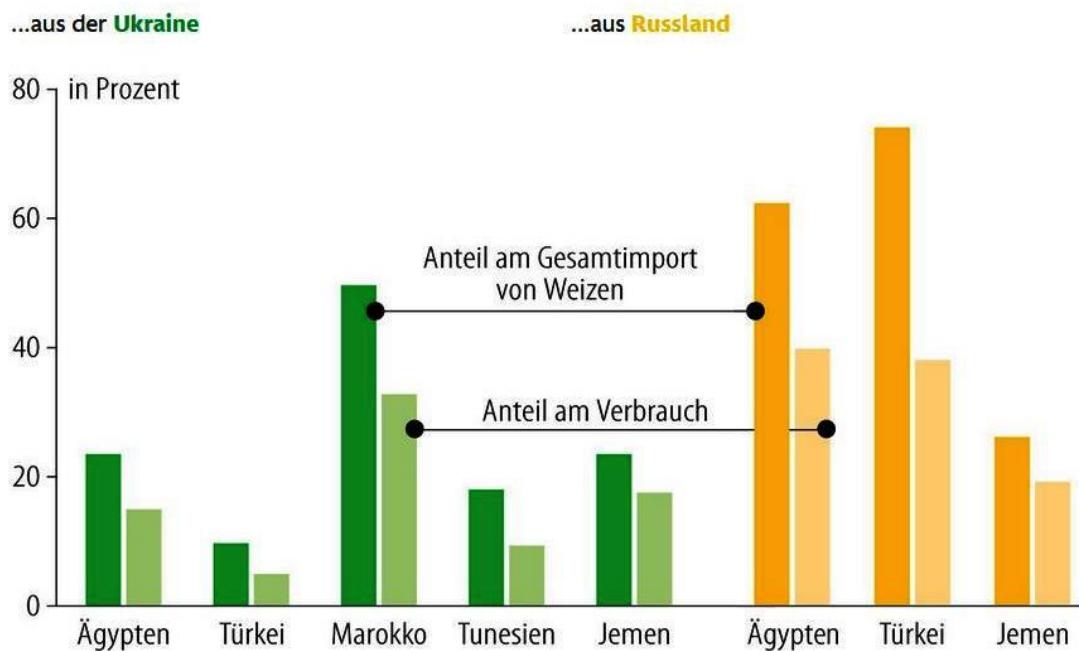
Moscow’s resurgent interest in Africa showed a new facet with the [Corona pandemic](#) since 2020, as revealed by the cases of the long-standing ‘socialist’ partner countries [Tanzania](#) and [Zambia](#). Besides cooperating in nuclear energy techniques, military equipment and training, mostly in exchange for preferential access to Africa’s natural resources, COVID-19 pandemic alleviation provided first-hand opportunities for novel geopolitical manipulation through the use of vaccines and opening or closing borders to ‘friendly’ countries (Kachur, 2022). Finally, the combat of Islamist terrorism in countries such as [Mali](#) and [Mozambique](#) provided important geo-strategic inroads. The promising prospects of a future Russian naval military base in Mozambique and the deployment of Russian para-governmental mercenary troops (the [Wagner Group](#)) in [Mali](#), ousting French anti-terrorism units, as well as in Sudan, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Libya and Mozambique, are just examples (Sukhankin, 2019; Ersozoglu, 2021).

## 5. The aftermath of Russian Ukraine war on African relations

The renewed [Russian aggression of Ukraine](#) that started on 24 February 2022 – the largest military assault on a European country since [World War II](#) - constituted a turning point in the history of Russian-African relations. Most African countries are low-income countries that will suffer the hardest, in particular the African poor. They had already to bear the consequences of the Corona pandemic and the climate crisis. The spillover effects of the Russian war will increase hunger and poverty even further (Kappel, 2022). Higher energy and food prices, reduced tourism, and potential difficulty accessing international capital markets will increase vulnerability notably in African countries that have minimal policy space to counter these effects of external shocks (Kammer et al, 2022).

According to model analyses of the [Kiel Institute for the World Economy](#), North African countries would be particularly affected. For example, more than 30 % of the wheat consumed in [Morocco](#) comes from the Ukraine which is the second-largest exporter of wheat to Africa. Also, [Tunisia](#) and [Egypt](#) would be hit hard. In Tunisia, wheat imports could permanently fall by more than 15 %, while imports of other grains would fall by almost 25 % in the simulation. In Egypt, the Ukrainian wheat export shortfall would result in over 17 % being imported, and imports of other cereals would decrease by 19 %. Cairo asked already the IMF for support in reminiscence of the bloody bread riots during the Arab Spring (Saleh, 2022). [South Africa](#) would import 7 % less wheat and over 16 % less other cereals. Imports of other cereals would be also lower in [Cameroon](#) (-14 %), [Algeria](#) and [Libya](#) (-9.6 %). Wheat imports would drop significantly in [Ethiopia](#) (-9.6 %), [Kenya](#) (-7.9 %), [Uganda](#) (-7.1 %), [Morocco](#) (-6.2 %), and [Mozambique](#) (-6 %) (Heidland, et al, 2022; Schiller, 2022).

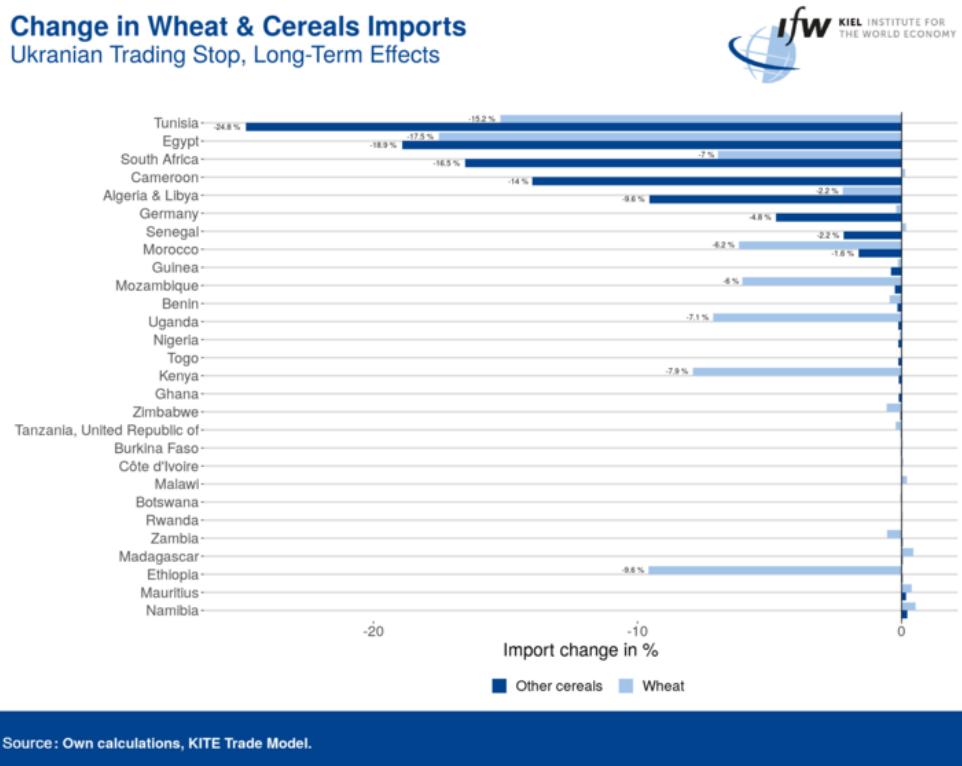
**Graph 7:** Dependency of Northern Africa on wheat from the Ukraine and Russia  
(share of total wheat import and share in consumption in %)



Grafik: Walter, jbel. / Quelle: UN Comtrade

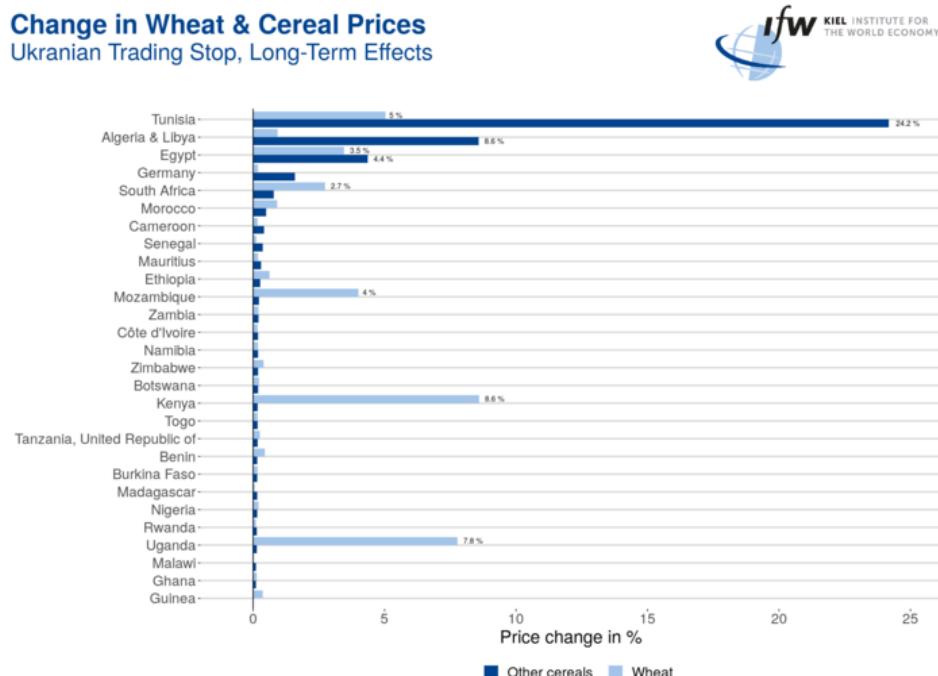
Source: Schiller, 2022

**Graph 8: Change in wheat and cereals imports (in %)**  
Ukrainian trading stop, probable long-term effects



Source: Heidland, et al, 2022

**Graph 9: Change in wheat and cereal prices (in %)**  
Ukrainian trading stop, probable long-term effects



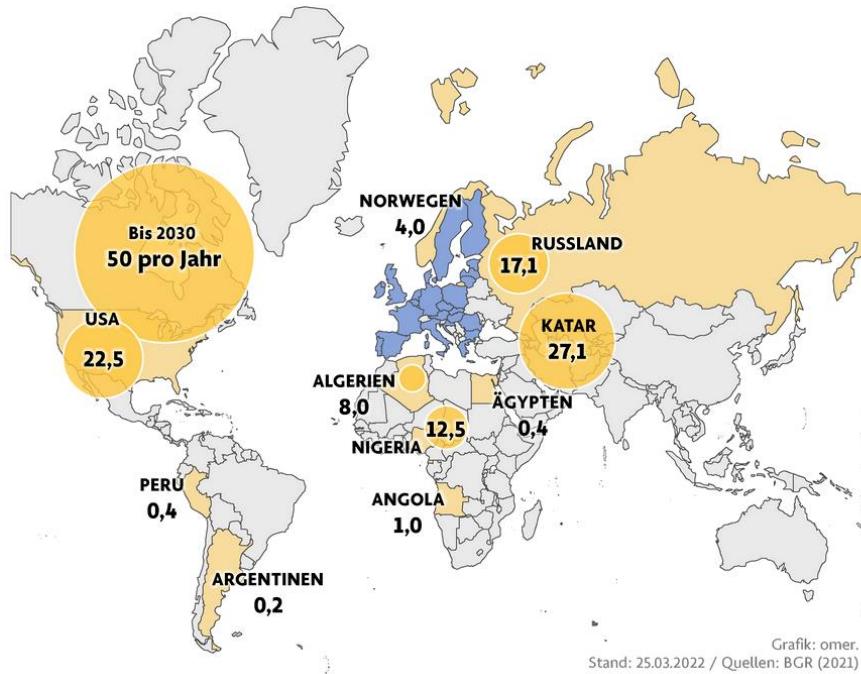
Source: Heidland, et al, 2022

South Africa's *Daily Maverick news* cautioned that the war in far-away Europe will "be felt in every village and town of South Africa and the world". Also South Africa's investments in Russia, amounting to nearly 80 bn [South African rands](#) (US\$ 5 bn; £ 3.7 bn) would be affected negatively, just as Russian investments in South Africa, totalling about 23bn rands (Heywood, 2022). On the other hand, oil- and gas-producing countries, like Nigeria and Angola, might profit from the rising prices. Yet, whether the poor and needy in these countries will also profit is highly unlikely. The cost of food and transport are likely to hit the roof, with knock-on effects on the prices of nearly all other products, pushing up inflation. Moreover, the bread prices are a major driver of political instability that had already triggered the [Arab Spring](#) in the early 2010s. The [Maghreb](#) countries Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, as well as Egypt, which all are heavily dependent on wheat, would probably be among the worst-affected. Last, but not least, African students in Ukraine will suffer. Most of them came from Morocco (8,000), Nigeria (4,000) and Egypt (3,500). They constituted almost 20% of all foreign students studying in Ukraine in 2020 (Heywood, 2022). When the Russian aggression started end of February 2022 many African students in Ukraine tried to escape to European countries. However, they were maltreated by Ukrainian security forces through racial profiling and by preventing them from boarding trains to cross into neighbouring countries (Holleis & Schwikowski 2022; Gbadamosi, 2022).

In principle, the rich potential of Africa's liquified natural gas (LNG) could reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy. Thus, [Algeria](#), the 10th-largest gas producer globally, contributes already to about 8 % of natural gas imports of the EU. Alongside the already existing Algerian gas pipeline to Spain, there are promising prospects for other SSA gas exporters. For example, [Nigeria](#), SSA's biggest producer of LNG, that already supplied LNG to several European countries, has been negotiating with [Niger](#) and Algeria for more than a decade on a [Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline](#) to increase exports of natural gas to European markets. On 16 February 2022, the three countries signed an agreement to develop the pipeline, estimated to cost US\$ 13 bn. Europe is likely to be a key financer, bolstered by the EU's controversial decision in early February to label investments in natural gas as "green" energy (Resnick, 2022). However, it is worthwhile to note that Nigeria did not bother to flare its natural gas as a by-product of oil production for decades which constituted at that time the single most important source of global environmental pollution. It remained one of the top seven gas flaring countries since 2012. Even today the country still loses about US \$ 82 bn from gas flaring yearly. With that background, the promises of Abuja to end gas flaring appears to be merely hot air (Adekoya, 2021; Ojewale, 2021).

Yet, there are serious security concerns because of growing [Islamist terrorism in the Sahel](#), and tensions between the governments of [Algiers](#) and [Niamey](#) did not allow the project to go ahead (Holleis & Schwikowski 2022). The Ukraine war also generated growing interest in [Tanzania's](#) gas reserves, which are the sixth-largest in Africa. In [Senegal](#), LNG production is expected to start at the end of 2022 concerning the 40 trillion cubic feet of natural gas that had been discovered between 2014 and 2017 (Resnick, 2022). Also, DR Congo and Angola, have given their availability to increase the quantities of natural gas. The British [BP](#) and the Italian [Eni](#) recently signed an agreement to form a new 50/50 independent gas company in [Angola](#).

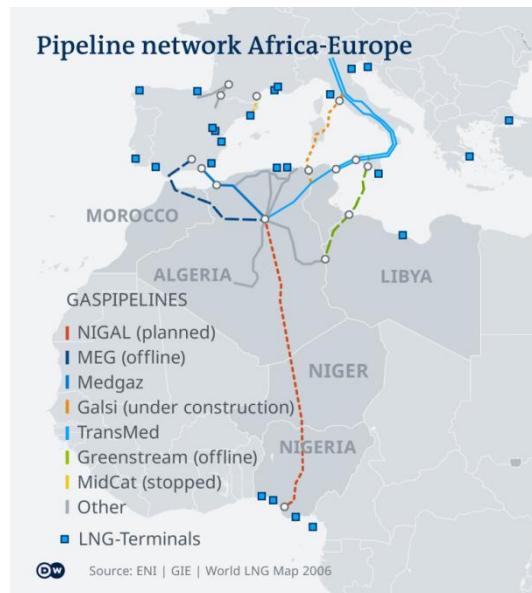
**Map 1:** Where the EU-LNG is coming from  
(LNG import by 28 EU members according to country of origin in 2020, bn m<sup>3</sup>)



Source: Nestler et al, 2022

Though, in general, serious bottlenecks stand in the way of implementing these projects in the short- and medium run. [Libya](#), for example, whose natural gas reserves in 2020 amounted to around 1.4 bn cubic meters is so politically divided and crisis-torn that it does not even appear on the list of countries exporting to Europe. Its insufficient infrastructure does not allow for boost exports, let alone to manage the payments. [Egypt](#) which is not yet connected to a European pipeline network prefers to deliver its LNG to China on the base of long-term contracts on good terms (Holleis & Schwikowski 2022).

**Graph 10:** Pipeline network Africa – Europe



Source: Holleis & Schwikowski 2022

## 6. Conclusion

Although African countries will suffer most under the direct and indirect consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine they have been reluctant to support Western positions concerning Russia's aggression for various reasons. First and foremost, there still is a great dependency of many African states on Russian delivery of military equipment and services. This is particularly relevant for autocratic African governments who tend to suppress opposition movements, including military means. Yet, even democratically elected governments in SSA will suffer from the economic shocks of the war. Secondly, African leaders, for example from Kenya, Ghana and Uganda, repeatedly deplored political double standards of the West, lastly in the [UN general assembly](#) in early March where the votes however are not legally binding. For example, the military interventions in [Kosovo](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Iraq](#), [Syria](#), [Yemen](#), [Somalia](#) and [Libya](#), were considered mostly unjustifiable, as were the interventions of the US and NATO in many countries. Sometimes these interventions were committed under false pretences and in flagrant violation of international law with destabilizing consequences for the whole region.

Moreover, many of the 'socialist' African states had additional ethical and political reservations. After all, Moscow had supported African liberation movements substantially over decades up to the end of the Cold War (Allison, 2022; Bröll & Meier 2022; Krisch, 2022). [Eritrea](#) was the only African state that voted in favour of Moscow. 17 African countries abstained, including South Africa, while six did not participate to avoid taking sides (Isilow, 2022). Eritrea won independence from [Ethiopia](#) only in 1993. Unlike the South African ANC, the [Eritrean People's Liberation Front](#) (EPLF) had not been supported by Moscow that, on the contrary, collaborated with its enemy, the Ethiopian [Derg](#). Nevertheless, the EPLF considered the Soviet Union as a strategic ally against imperialism. Besides, Eritrea is of considerable strategical interest for Moscow because of its location at the southern end of the Red Sea, where other major and regional powers like the US and China established already military bases, e.g in [Djibouti](#) (Bröll & Meier 2022).

In view of the new Russian aggression European countries and the NATO were united as never before since the end of the Cold War. According to French President [Emmanuel Macron](#), Moscow's war in Ukraine is "a turning point in the history of Europe and our country". He denounced a "violation of the UN Charter and the founding principles of the European and international order" (Demagny, 2022). The German Chancellor [Olaf Scholz](#) announced a paradigm change in response to the Ukraine invasion (Kinkartz, 2022). The British Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) qualified Russia's actions in Ukraine as war crimes. According to him, the shelling of [Kharkiv](#) by Russian forces was an atrocity reminiscent of the attacks on [Sarajevo](#) in the 1990s (James & MacLellan 2022). US President [Joe Biden](#) believed that Russia's war in Ukraine could define Putin's presidency. He assured the US allies [Poland](#) and [Romania](#) "to demonstrate the strength and unity of the NATO Alliance and US support for NATO's eastern flank allies in the face of Russian aggression" (Liptak & Collins 2022).

To what extent this will impact Russian – African relations remains to be seen. The strong links between London, Paris and Lisbon and their former African colonies, as well as the substantive political and economic influence, including development aid, also provided by EU countries like Germany, will certainly be used as argument to convince African leaders to change allegiance.

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**Résumé :** Poutine attache une grande importance à la reconstruction de la Russie en tant que puissance mondiale, y compris les relations avec l'Afrique. Mais alors que l'Union soviétique prônait la modernisation socialiste en Afrique, Moscou ne propose plus d'idéologies socialistes. Au lieu de cela, il se concentre sur l'accès aux élites africaines, en particulier les dirigeants autoritaires. Il cherche également à influencer les élections en sa faveur, en particulier dans les États fragiles mais riches en ressources. Le Kremlin dit vouloir éviter de concurrencer directement les autres puissances actives en Afrique. Au contraire, il veut se concentrer sur les pays où ni l'Occident ni la Chine ne dominent. Là, il s'attend à pouvoir travailler plus efficacement. Mais la Russie, comme la Chine, défie les normes occidentales, sapant les sanctions américaines et européennes. En outre, les deux partenaires stratégiques soutiennent la non-ingérence dans les affaires intérieures des États. En plus, les relations de la Russie avec l'Afrique sont fortement influencées par son intérêt pour les ressources africaines et les marchés de la sécurité. La résurgence de la Russie en Afrique profite notamment du terrorisme islamiste, par exemple au Sahel et au Mozambique. Il utilise les États fragiles et les conflits en cours pour obtenir des contrats d'armement lucratifs et des concessions minières. Moscou a signé des accords de coopération militaire avec 21 gouvernements africains, y compris des négociations sur l'établissement de bases militaires. Il utilise des sous-traitants paramilitaires pour manipuler le cours des conflits locaux en sa faveur. En retour, Moscou peut compter sur le soutien des dirigeants africains en matière de politique étrangère. Ainsi, l'Érythrée a voté contre une résolution de l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies condamnant fermement la guerre de la Russie en Ukraine. 18 autres pays africains se sont abstenus, dont le Mali, le Mozambique, l'Angola et l'Afrique du Sud.

**Zusammenfassung:** Putin misst dem Wiederaufbau Russlands als Weltmacht große Bedeutung bei, einschließlich der Beziehungen zu Afrika. Doch während die Sowjetunion früher die sozialistische Modernisierung in Afrika propagierte, bietet Moskau keine sozialistischen Ideologien mehr an. Stattdessen konzentriert es sich auf den Zugang zu afrikanischen Eliten, insbesondere zu autoritären Führern. Außerdem versucht es, Wahlen zu seinen Gunsten zu beeinflussen, insbesondere in fragilen, aber rohstoffreichen Staaten. Damit will der Kreml nach eigenen Angaben vermeiden, direkt mit anderen in Afrika aktiven Mächten zu konkurrieren. Vielmehr will er sich auf Länder konzentrieren, in denen weder der Westen noch China dominieren. Dort erwartet er, effektiver arbeiten zu können. Doch Russland stellt ebenso wie China westliche Normen in Frage und untergräbt damit die US- und EU-Sanktionen. Darüber hinaus unterstützen beide strategischen Partner die Politik der Nichteinmischung in innere Angelegenheiten der Staaten. Zudem werden Russlands Beziehungen zu Afrika maßgeblich durch sein Interesse an afrikanischen Ressourcen und Sicherheitsmärkten beeinflusst. Russlands Wiedererstarken in Afrika profitiert nicht zuletzt vom islamistischen Terrorismus, etwa in der Sahelzone und in Mosambik. Dabei nutzt es fragile Staaten und andauernde Konflikte, um sich lukrative Waffengeschäfte und Bergbaukonzessionen zu sichern. Moskau unterzeichnete militärische Kooperationsabkommen mit 21 afrikanischen Regierungen, einschließlich Verhandlungen über die Errichtung von Militärstützpunkten. Es nutzt paramilitärische Auftragnehmer, um den Verlauf lokaler Konflikte zu seinen Gunsten zu manipulieren. Im Gegenzug kann Moskau auf die Unterstützung afrikanischer Führer in der Außenpolitik zählen. So stimmte Eritrea gegen eine Resolution der UN General Versammlung, in welcher Russlands Krieg in der Ukraine scharf verurteilt wurde. 18 weitere afrikanische Länder enthielten sich der Stimme, darunter Mali, Mosambik, Angola und Südafrika.